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ABSTRACT

Developed by the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board's (MHECB's) Task Force on Associate Degree Standards, this report recommends standards for all associate degrees granted by Minnesota post-secondary institutions. Chapter I provides introductory and background information on the creation and legislative charge of the task force and related activities taking place on national and state levels. Chapter II contains a summary of the task force's discussion and overall recommendations concerning three general interest issues (i.e., objectives of associate degrees, competencies evidenced by associate degrees, and some measure of program length) and four specific interest issues (i.e., level and scope of learning, program coherence, general education content and transferability, and nonmenclature of degrees). Procedural recommendations for implementing these standards are detailed in chapter III. These recommendations are grouped according to the agencies and individuals responsible for their implementation; i.e., the MHECB, two-year college governing boards, baccalaureate degree-granting boards, administrators, faculty, and students and parents. Appendices include definitions, principles related to associate degrees, and an agreement for the transfer of general education. (LAL)

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ASSOCIATE DEGREE STANDARDS

TASK FORCE REPORT

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Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board, 1986

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REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON ASSOCIATE DEGREE STANDARDS

March 19, 1986

Minnesota
Higher Education
Coordinating Board

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PREFACE

The Task Force on Associate Degree Standards was convened by the Higher Education Coordinating Board to recommend standards for all associate degrees granted by Minnesota post-secondary institutions.

Throughout this report, the following definitions will be used:

- **Post-secondary education and post-secondary institution** refer to all institutions offering instruction beyond high school. Colleges, universities, technical institutes, and vocational schools are considered post-secondary institutions.

- **Colleges or collegiate institutions** are those post-secondary institutions that offer a core of instruction in the liberal arts to develop general intellectual capabilities of students. The University of Minnesota, the state universities, the community colleges, and two and four-year private colleges are collegiate institutions which grant associate and baccalaureate degrees built upon such a core.

- **Technical institutes and other vocational schools** are post-secondary institutions that offer programs, usually lasting two years or less, to prepare students for specific occupations. General education for non-vocational goals is not a primary mission. Both public vocational technical institutes and private vocational schools serve Minnesota. Until recently, these institutions did not offer associate or baccalaureate degrees upon program completion. The State Board of Vocational Technical Education in Minnesota, however, now has the authority to award associate degrees to graduates of selected programs that include a general education component. Several private vocational schools also offer associate degree programs.

- **Degree credit** is academic credit that counts toward associate and baccalaureate degree requirements. For administrative purposes, some institutions may award other forms of credit that do not apply to college degrees.

- **College degrees** include associate and baccalaureate degrees whether awarded by a college, technical institute, or vocational school.

- **College-level instruction** or **college-level skills** refer to instructional content that is sufficiently complex and rigorous to be appropriate for degree credit in post-secondary institutions.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The awarding of associate degrees by two and four-year colleges is a commonly accepted practice to designate completion of two years of a college-level educational program. Until recently, the awarding of such degrees by non-collegiate post-secondary institutions was rare, particularly in Minnesota. Within the past two years, however, six private vocational schools have applied through the Higher Education Coordinating Board's Private Institution Registration Program for permission to grant associate degrees, 11 area vocational technical institutes (AVTIs) have expressed interest in cooperatively offering associate degrees with a collegiate institution, and legislation has been enacted to clarify the process for Minnesota's AVTIs to award associate degrees.

This interest by post-secondary vocational institutions is fostered by several factors. Some employers express a preference for degree holders when advertising new positions. Some employers reimburse employees who enroll in degree programs but not those enrolled in certificate programs. Some students believe that a degree will convey a more favorable message to prospective employers and baccalaureate institutions than will other awards for program completion. Some institutions believe the availability of associate degrees will help recruit students. These situations increase pressure on institutions to award associate degrees.

Because of the increased interest shown by institutions in awarding associate degrees, and the absence of guidelines for evaluating associate degree program proposals, Coordinating Board staff proposed discussion of degree standards during the April 1985 Board meeting and suggested three alternative courses of action. Following discussion of the issue, the Board directed staff to appoint a task force and develop a study methodology to review the issue of associate degree standards for Minnesota post-secondary institutions.

Background

The Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board examined the issue of associate degrees in 1980 and adopted five recommendations. Several recommendations established minimal requirements for all associate degrees.[1] The guidelines for associate degrees suggested that three types of degrees differentiated by the required amount of liberal arts and sciences courses be awarded:

- programs designated Associate in Arts (A.A.) should be composed of at least two-thirds liberal arts and sciences courses,

[1] *Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board, Associate Degrees in Minnesota Post-Secondary Institutions (October 1980).*

• programs designated Associate in Science (A.S.) should be composed of at least one-half liberal arts and sciences/general education coursework, and

• programs designated as Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) should be composed of at least one-third liberal arts and science/general education coursework.

Minnesota's three public collegiate governing boards adopted these guidelines, a move that greatly standardized the associate degrees awarded by Minnesota institutions.

In February 1981, the Coordinating Board adopted three additional recommendations:

• The governor and legislature should provide in statute that neither the State Board of Education nor the local boards of education shall authorize the awarding of degrees by Minnesota area vocational technical institutes except in cooperation with collegiate institutions or through the normal program review process.

• The legislature should not appropriate funds for any programs which have not undergone review as provided in 136A.04(d).

• The Coordinating Board staff would be directed to work with appropriate members of the legislature to accomplish the above recommendations.[2]

The 1981 Minnesota Legislature enacted legislation that stated:

"The state board for vocational education may approve, disapprove, or modify a plan for awarding associate degrees at an area vocational technical institute. The state board shall approve a plan only when an associate degree is required by a licensing authority and is offered in cooperation with a collegiate institution. The state board may approve an area vocational technical institute plan for awarding an associate degree which is not offered in cooperation with a collegiate institution only if cooperation is not practicable. All associate degree plans approved by the state board for vocational education shall be presented to the higher education coordinating board for review and recommendation..."[3]

Legislation enacted in 1985 repealed the licensing authority requirement of the 1981 law.[4] This action makes it easier for an AVTI to implement associate degree programs, although cooperation with collegiate institutions continues to be an expectation.

[1] *Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board, Associate Degrees in Minnesota Area Vocational-Technical Institutes (February 26, 1981).*
[2] *Minnesota Statutes 1984, Section 136C.042.*
[3] *Minnesota Statutes 1985 Supplement, Section 136C.042.*

During the past two years, 37 associate degree programs have been developed by Minnesota AVTIs. For two of the proposed programs, the AVTI will grant the degree; the other 35 will be a cooperative arrangement between an AVTI and a collegiate institution. The Coordinating Board has reviewed 12 of the proposed cooperative arrangements through its program review process, and Board staff has requested that the others be submitted for review. During 1984, the Board favorably reviewed 20 proposals for new Associate in Applied Science programs from six private vocational schools.

Charge

The charge given to the task force was to establish standards for associate degrees awarded by Minnesota post-secondary institutions as they relate to the skills, knowledges, and abilities expected of degree recipients. The charge was to address the outcomes expected of associate degree recipients, as well as the curriculum content, sequence, and distribution.

The task force was asked to examine associate degree standards and not to describe standards for certificate, diploma, other non-degree, or baccalaureate programs. The charge assumes that associate degrees should be distinct from other post-secondary awards.

Assumptions

Two assumptions are important to understanding this report:

- The responsibility for credit evaluation and degree standards remains with the faculty and administration of each institution.

- Post-secondary institutions will continue to apply a variety of admissions criteria. The recommendations are not intended to be used as admissions requirements by all institutions. They provide, instead, a basis for advising students regarding associate degree programs and for establishing minimum standards for awarding associate degrees.

Related Activity

Discussion on this issue has occurred during a period of national and state inquiry into the quality of elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education.

In 1985, the Coordinating Board established the Task Force on Definition of College-Level Skills to specify the skills and knowledge that should be characteristic of degree credit instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics in Minnesota post-secondary institutions.

That task force was created as a result of the Coordinating Board's study regarding remedial courses in post-secondary institutions, a study that documented the variation in degree credit policies for basic courses in reading, writing, and mathematics.[5] In essence, courses considered "remedial" or "developmental" at one institution have been recognized fully as "college-level" at others.

To provide a consistent message to students preparing for post-secondary education and to clarify degree standards, the Coordinating Board recommended that a task force seek a consensus on expectations for degree credit instruction. A goal of this recommendation was to assure that there are incentives for high school students to take college preparatory courses without denying access to those who, for one reason or another, will need developmental help to complete degree programs. The task force released its report in January 1986.[6]

Work Plan

Members of the Task Force on Associate Degree Standards were named in Summer 1985 by the executive director of the Higher Education Coordinating Board based on nominations by personnel from post-secondary systems and institutions and the Board's Student Advisory Committee. Membership included system and campus administrators responsible for policy development and implementation. The task force reviewed national studies regarding post-secondary education quality and assessment, as well as associate degree policies of other states. Task force members met eight times between July 1985 and March 1986.

Contents

The task force discussed numerous issues regarding associate degrees, some much more specific than others. Discussion of the general issues led to several recommendations by the task force. The discussion resulted in definitions of associate degrees, provided in Appendix 1, and a statement of principles related to associate degrees, listed in Appendix 2. Chapter II of this report includes the substantive recommendations of the task force, while Chapter III presents the procedural recommendations for implementing the standards discussed in Chapter II.

[5] *Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board, Remedial and Skills Development Instruction in Minnesota Post-Secondary Education (May 1984).*
[6] *Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board, Report of the Task Force on Definition of College-Level Skills (January 1986).*

CHAPTER II. ASSOCIATE DEGREE STANDARDS

This chapter contains a summary of the discussion of three general interest issues and four specific interest issues discussed by the task force. Table 1 presents the consensus reached by the task force regarding principles related to associate degrees.

General Issues

Three issues of general interest were discussed: the objectives, competencies, and extent of learning identified with associate degrees.

Objectives of Associate Degrees

First, associate degree programs are designed for one of two objectives, either to prepare for an occupation, or to provide a foundation for a baccalaureate degree program. It is important to distinguish between the two objectives and to convey a clear message regarding associate degrees to students, parents, employers, and institutions. Students without a clear objective and those taking courses in a casual manner should realize that associate degrees are awarded for completion of a coherent and organized set of experiences.

Competencies

Second, all associate degrees should provide evidence of competencies in communications, social sciences, humanities and fine arts, analytical and inferential reasoning, and computational skills, as well as the ability to learn on one's own. Associate degree holders should possess abilities, knowledge, and skills that distinguish them from high school graduates as well as from post-secondary certificate or diploma holders.

Associate degree holders need both oral and written communication skills, especially those skills that facilitate interaction with others. These communication skills allow people to translate the theoretical to the applied. Associate degree holders need certain analytical or computational skills such as basic scientific methodology. Students need to develop their inductive and deductive reasoning, as well as critical thinking skills. Students especially need to develop the ability to learn on their own throughout life. Associate degree holders should be able to understand and appreciate their culture and environment, and to develop a system of personal values that lead to civic and social responsibility.

Not all skills are attained fully through organized courses. Various activities sponsored by educational institutions provide opportunities to develop intellectually and socially.

TABLE 1. ISSUES REGARDING THREE TYPES OF ASSOCIATE DEGREES

ISSUE	TYPE OF DEGREE A.A.	A.S.	A.A.S.
A. Major Objective			
1. Pre-baccalaureate	Yes	Yes	No
2. Occupational at 2-year level	No	No*	Yes
B. Label-specific	No	Yes	Yes
C. Non-remedial	Yes	Yes	Yes
D. Required fields	Yes	Yes	Yes
E. Minimum total credits	90	90	90
F. Curriculum Components			
1. General Education designed for transfer			
a. Minimum credits	60	45	30
b. Core areas			
i. Communication	8	6	3
ii. Social Science	12	6	3
iii. Humanities	12	6	3
iv. Math/Natural Science	12	6	3
c. Additional credits from core areas	16	21	18
2. Technical Education — minimum credits	0	0	45

**Consensus reached with exception of two members.*

Components of degree requirements should be stated in terms of specific skills and knowledge. The task force discussed at length the desirability of establishing outcome oriented standards for associate degree holders. The task deserves attention, and if accomplished, would provide a more meaningful method of assessing student achievement than counting credits earned and hours invested. Establishing outcome indicators for all areas of study, however, would require more time and effort than was available to the task force. It also would require the assistance of subject matter specialists not represented on the task force.

Extent of Learning

Third, some measure of program length should be established in order to clarify what is meant by an associate degree. All associate degrees should require the equivalent of at least two academic years of full-time study built around a defined body of knowledge. Because full-time enrollment is becoming less common, 90 quarter credit hours should be used as a proxy for two years of full-time study and be established as the minimum length for associate degree programs. Regardless of time or accomplishment measures used by institutions, associate degrees should not be granted for programs less than the equivalent of 90 quarter credit hours.

Use of credits as the base for program length will require some changes, particularly by the vocational sector. Minnesota area vocational technical institutes use clock hours as the base for program length and for calculating state appropriations. Many private vocational schools also use clock hours in describing program length. Some institutions use competencies or courses in describing program length. In order to use 90 quarter credit hours as the minimum program requirement, it will be necessary to establish methods for converting other forms of time or accomplishment measures to quarter hours.

It would be appropriate for some programs to establish a minimum requirement greater than 90 credits in order to achieve the technical expertise required for occupational placement or for program accreditation. Market forces and legislative funding patterns significantly affect maximum program length.

Specific Issues

Four specific issues were discussed: level and scope of learning, program coherence, general education component and transferability, and nomenclature of associate degrees.

Level and Scope of Learning

All experiences that count toward an associate degree should be clearly post-secondary in nature, i.e., non-remedial. The instructional content that applies toward a degree should be sufficiently complex and rigorous to be appropriate for degree credit. Institutions may award other forms of credit that would not apply toward college degrees, and courses required to prepare people for college level work are appropriate for post-secondary institutions. Only work that is clearly post-secondary, however, should count toward a degree.

Program Coherence

Some educational experiences provide an essential base on which other, both theoretical and applied, experiences rely, and all associate degree programs should consist of a coherent sequence of experiences. As more students return to

post-secondary education on a part-time basis, it will be necessary to provide maximum flexibility, while recognizing that some programs may require a highly structured, sequential pattern with little flexibility.

General Education

Required Component. General education should be an integral part of all associate degree programs in order to develop characteristics that help define an educated person. Liberal arts and sciences are a fundamental component of collegiate degrees. Granting a degree implies that the student has achieved general education experiences in addition to technical preparation that may be part of a program.

A clear distinction is needed between programs that contain general education and those that do not. One way to make that distinction is to define the title that may be awarded for completion of a program of study. While titles are not intended to convey a message regarding the quality or value of a program, they are intended to convey certain characteristics of a program.

So that consumers can differentiate between titles, only programs that contain a liberal arts and sciences component should be labeled as associate degree programs. To use either the term "associate" or "degree," programs must include a significant general education component. Post-secondary programs without a general education component could confer titles such as "certificate," "diploma," or some other designation.

Applicability to Baccalaureate Degrees. The general education portion of associate degrees should be acceptable toward baccalaureate degrees. Because all educational experiences are to be clearly post-secondary in nature, it is appropriate that the liberal arts and sciences coursework applies toward the general education requirements of baccalaureate programs.

The Minnesota community college and state university systems have agreed that completion of an Associate in Arts degree at a Minnesota community college will signify that the distributed general education requirement has been met, in partial fulfillment of requirements for a baccalaureate degree at each of the state universities (Appendix 3). This agreement means that equivalent general education courses offered by the community colleges replace courses provided by the four-year institutions. While the agreement between the two systems applies to only the Associate in Arts degree, it establishes the principle that general education coursework taken to fulfill associate degree requirements should at least partially satisfy baccalaureate degree general education requirements.

This agreement does not mean that students who receive degrees other than Associate in Arts should expect automatic transfer of general education courses. The decision of whether a course is acceptable toward a baccalaureate degree is made by the receiving senior institution. It does mean that students should be able to request transfer of their general education on a course by course basis.

Types of Degrees

The task force discussed the type and content of the 90 quarter hours that constitute associate degrees, especially the general education component. In 1980, the Coordinating Board recommended that institutions issue only three types of associate degrees, and that all of them include general education. The task force concurred with these two recommendations, and agreed that associate degrees should be differentiated on the basis of their program objectives as well as the amount and distribution of general education included in each of the three types. The task force developed a set of definitions for associate degrees offered by Minnesota institutions (Appendix 1).

Associate in Arts

Associate in Arts (A.A.) degree programs are primarily intended to provide a broad liberal arts and sciences background. Associate in Arts programs should include at least 90 quarter credit hours of completed coursework which is defined as college level and which is designed to constitute the foundation for a baccalaureate degree. A minimum of 60 credits of the total for the degree should be in the four categories of Communications, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Mathematics and/or Natural Sciences. A minimum of eight credits should be in Communications, and a minimum of 12 credits should be in each of the categories of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Mathematics/Natural Sciences. The remaining 16 credits of the 60 should be chosen from one or more of these four categories.

The agreement between Minnesota community colleges and state universities (Appendix 3) specifies the above distribution of liberal arts and sciences coursework. This is an appropriate arrangement for A.A. degrees to be awarded by all Minnesota post-secondary institutions. The task force also supports the compilation and distribution of lists and descriptions of specific general education courses acceptable to baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. This activity would provide helpful information for students, counselors, and other institutional personnel.

In recent years there has been a proliferation of titles attached to associate degrees, especially in occupational areas. The major objective of A.A. programs is to fulfill the first two years of a baccalaureate program. The major objective is not to provide

the technical preparation required for entry into an occupation. Students may use the remaining 30 degree credits to acquire limited technical expertise in a given area, but this would apply to a small portion of those pursuing the A.A. degree. Associate in Arts should be used without further designation, i.e., it should not identify a specific major.

Associate in Science

Associate in Science (A.S.) degree programs are intended to provide a liberal arts and sciences background and to provide the foundation for baccalaureate programs with highly structured lower division requirements. Associate in Science programs should include at least 90 quarter credits, with a minimum of 45 liberal arts and sciences credits from within the four categories of Communications, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Mathematics/Natural Sciences. Included in the 45 should be at least six credits in each of the four categories. The remaining 21 credits of the 45 should be chosen from one or more of these four categories. A majority of liberal arts and sciences courses may be prerequisite to, or specifically supportive of, certain applied courses.

A common pattern is to award the A.S. degree to students planning to major in engineering, agriculture or the sciences with heavy undergraduate requirements in mathematics and science. Credits earned in these programs are designed for transfer toward some baccalaureate programs, although there are no system to system agreements regarding transfer of credits similar to the one for Associate in Arts degrees between Minnesota community colleges and state universities.

It is the intent of these recommendations that the Associate in Arts and Associate in Science degrees be closely related and that transfer toward a baccalaureate degree be a major objective of both. The A.S., however, is more program-specific. In the past, some A.S. programs have been designed to prepare people for employment after two years of post-secondary education. Because of this, A.S. programs contain less general education coursework and more technical preparation. Specific requirements of highly structured baccalaureate degrees such as engineering and business will require that the A.S. continue to be less broad than the A.A. Because the major objective of the A.S. degree is to transfer toward a baccalaureate degree, however, a minimum of 45 credits should be liberal arts and sciences from within the same four categories as for the Associate in Arts.

Students pursuing an A.S. degree are likely to have more of their coursework prescribed than are students pursuing an A.A. degree. Some A.S. programs may be so highly prescribed that students have no choice of elective coursework. This requires careful planning to assure that students will fulfill some of the requirements for a baccalaureate degree in their chosen field.

Because A.S. degree programs are more specific and contain more prescribed applied coursework, there is often interest in attaching a label to the degree. In order to distinguish A.S. degree programs from the occupationally-specific Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree, only broad subject area labels should be designated on the A.S. For example, an institution might award an A.S. in Agriculture or an A.S. in Business, but not an A.S. in Agricultural Business.

While transfer of credit to a baccalaureate institution is less automatic for an A.S. than an A.A. degree, the A.S. degree holder should be able to expect that most of the courses will satisfy lower division undergraduate requirements of a four-year institution that offers a baccalaureate degree in the same area of study. All the general education courses should be acceptable to four-year colleges and universities, although specific general education distribution requirements may not be satisfied. It is critical that students pursuing an A.S. degree program carefully plan their freshman and sophomore coursework.

Associate in Applied Science

Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree programs are intended primarily to prepare people for employment — a clear distinction between the A.A.S. and other associate degrees. The need to prepare for employment requires that a majority of the education experiences relate to an occupation or cluster of occupations. For this reason, at least 45 credits should be program-related occupational or technical courses. Because A.A.S. programs are not intended as pre-baccalaureate preparation, students should be aware that four-year institutions may accept only the general education coursework and a limited portion of the other coursework as applying toward the requirements of a baccalaureate degree.

Associate in Applied Science degree programs are likely to be highly prescribed both in the general education, the theoretical, and the applied portions of the curriculum. Because graduates would receive an associate degree, however, A.A.S. programs should include a minimum of 90 quarter credit hours, at least 30 of which are in liberal arts and sciences. Included in the 30 should be at least three credits in each of the four categories of Communications, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Mathematics/Natural Sciences. The remaining 18 general education credits from the four categories may be prescribed to provide theoretical support for an occupation.

A.A.S. degree programs often require 60 or more credits in program specific occupational or technical courses. Specific coursework requirements often are influenced by outside accrediting or licensing bodies interested in assuring technically competent employees. There may be instances where acquisition of

technical competence for an occupation requires two years or more of program-specific coursework. Institutions offering this type of program may have to decide whether such a program is to result in an associate degree or some other award. Because they are specific in nature, A.A.S. degree titles should include the nature of the program, e.g., A.A.S. in Agricultural Marketing.

CHAPTER III. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary charge from the executive director of the Higher Education Coordinating Board was to recommend standards that should be expected of students who receive associate degrees from Minnesota post-secondary institutions. In order to achieve and maintain the standards listed in Chapter II, high educational goals must be supported by Minnesota's educational systems. The following recommendations are grouped according to the agencies and individuals responsible for acting on them.

Higher Education Coordinating Board

We recommend that the Board:

- Endorse the definitions and principles in this report.

- Transmit the definitions and principles in this report to the state's public and private post-secondary governing boards.

- Inform high school students and their parents about the academic expectations and preparation needed to complete an associate degree.

Governing Boards of Two-Year Institutions

Governing boards of two-year institutions are responsible for establishing policies regarding requirements for non-baccalaureate programs. Completion of these programs, which vary in length and complexity, may result in the awarding of an associate degree or other recognition. We recommend that governing bodies responsible for Minnesota two-year post-secondary education institutions:

- Award associate degrees only in accordance with the definitions and principles in this report.

- Accept only work that is clearly post-secondary in nature toward a degree.

- Work with four-year institutions to develop lists of general education courses acceptable toward baccalaureate degrees.

- Develop statements of outcome and outcome-oriented assessment measures.

Baccalaureate Degree-Granting Governing Boards

Governing boards of four-year institutions are responsible for establishing policies regarding degree completion requirements and acceptance of previous educational experiences toward program completion. We recommend that governing bodies responsible for Minnesota baccalaureate-degree granting institutions:

- Recognize completion of an Associate in Arts degree as fulfilling the general education requirement for the baccalaureate degree when the intent of the degree program is that the general education component be completed in the first two years of study.

- Accept only work that is clearly post-secondary in nature toward a degree.

- Continue to evaluate learner outcomes for incoming as well as established students.

- Accept general education courses offered as part of associate degree programs as fulfilling their similar general education requirements.

- Develop statements of outcomes and outcome-oriented assessment measures.

Administrators

We recommend that administrators in post-secondary institutions:

- Endorse and implement the principles and definitions in this report and publicize them to students and parents.

- Work to improve communications between students and advisors.

- Support faculty in the development of outcome-oriented assessment measures for associate degree holders.

Faculty

We recommend that faculty in Minnesota post-secondary institutions:

- Endorse and implement the principles and definitions in this report by:

  — Identifying specific outcome-oriented standards for associate degree holders, especially in the areas of Communications, Social Sciences, Humanities, and Mathematics and/or Natural Sciences.

— Establishing and publicizing the proper sequence of courses and/or experiences required for completion of a degree program.

Students and Parents

We recommend that students preparing to enter post-secondary education and their parents:

• Learn about the competencies students will need to enter and succeed in their chosen program.

• Work with high school teachers and counselors to select courses that will prepare students with the competencies they will need for the general and/or applied education provided by post-secondary institutions.

Conclusions

This report offers a consensus of task force members concerning the appropriate standards for associate degrees granted by Minnesota post-secondary education institutions. If implemented, the standards will provide a basis for awarding and transferring degree credits in degree-granting post-secondary institutions.

APPENDIX 1
ASSOCIATE DEGREE DEFINITIONS

Associate degrees awarded by Minnesota post-secondary institutions shall meet the following definitions:

Associate in Arts (A.A.). The A.A. degree may be awarded for successful completion of programs primarily intended to provide a broad liberal arts and sciences background. Associate in Arts programs shall include at least 90 quarter credit hours of completed coursework which is defined as college level and which is designed to constitute the foundation for a baccalaureate degree. A minimum of 60 credits of the total for the degree shall be in liberal arts and sciences within the four categories of Communications, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Mathematics/Natural Sciences. A minimum of eight credits shall be in Communications, and a minimum of 12 credits shall be in each of the categories of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Mathematics/Natural Sciences. The remaining 16 credits of the 60 shall be chosen from one or more of these four categories.

Associate in Science (A.S.). The A.S. degree may be awarded for successful completion of programs which are intended to provide a liberal arts and sciences background and to provide the foundation for baccalaureate programs with highly structured lower division requirements. Associate in Science programs shall include at least 90 quarter credits, with a minimum of 45 liberal arts and sciences credits from within the four categories of Communications, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Mathematics/Natural Sciences. Included in the 45 shall be at least six credits in each of the four categories. The remaining 21 credits of the 45 shall be chosen from one or more of these four categories. A majority of the liberal arts and science courses may be prerequisite to, or specifically supportive of, certain technical courses.

Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.). The A.A.S. degree may be awarded for successful completion of programs primarily intended to prepare people for employment. A.A.S. programs shall include a minimum of 90 quarter credit hours, at least 30 of which are in liberal arts and sciences. Included in the 30 shall be at least three credits in each of the four categories of Communications, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Mathematics/Natural Sciences. The remaining 18 general education credits from the four categories may be prescribed to provide theoretical support for the occupational program. At least 45 credits shall be program-related occupational or technical courses.

APPENDIX 2
PRINCIPLES RELATED TO ASSOCIATE DEGREES

1. The awarding of an associate degree should signify the ability to learn on one's own as well as possession of competence in the areas of:

a. Communications,
b. Social Sciences,
c. Humanities/Fine Arts,
d. Analytical, inferential reasoning,
e. Computational skills, and
f. Specialized study in a defined body of knowledge either for entry or advancement in an occupation, or transfer toward a baccalaureate degree.

Rationale: Associate degree holders should possess abilities, knowledges, and skills that distinguish them from high school graduates as well as from post-secondary certificate or diploma holders. Associate degree holders need both oral and written communication skills, especially those skills that facilitate interaction with others. Associate degree holders also need certain analytical or computational skills — basic scientific methodology, how to learn, inductive and deductive reasoning and critical thinking skills. Finally, associate degree holders need to gain knowledge necessary to the objective of the degree.

2. All experiences that count toward an associate degree are clearly post-secondary in nature.

Rationale: Post-secondary instruction refers to instructional content that is sufficiently complex and rigorous to be appropriate for degree credit. Some institutions may award other forms of credit that do not apply to college degrees.

3. An associate degree program should consist of a coherent sequence of educational experiences.

Rationale: Some educational experiences provide an essential base upon which other, both theoretical and applied, experiences rely. Educational programs should be integrated to reflect the sequential relationship between their theoretical and applied aspects. A program is not simply a collection of randomly chosen courses.

4. Only programs that contain specific liberal arts and sciences/general education coursework should be labeled as associate degree programs; certificate, diploma or some other designation that contains neither the term "associate" nor "degree" should be used for programs that lack this general education component.

Rationale: General education should be an integral part of all associate degree programs in order to develop characteristics that help define an educated person. Liberal arts and sciences are a fundamental component of collegiate degrees. In order to maintain the societal usefulness of the associate degree, there should be a clear distinction between degree programs and other programs that do not contain a general education/liberal studies component.

5. General education coursework should be of a level and scope acceptable toward baccalaureate degrees.

Rationale: Lower division general education coursework should be applicable to a baccalaureate degree and should, therefore, be considered transferable. All collegiate degrees should contain work which is distinct from high school level work. Courses that are tailored to specialized programs of study should not be categorized as liberal arts and sciences since they may not be designed for transfer as general education.

6. Associate degrees are differentiated on the basis of their program objectives as well as the amount and distribution of general education. All associate degrees require completion of the equivalent of 90 quarter credit hours.

a. Programs designated as Associate in Arts (A.A.) should be designed to be composed of at least 60 quarter credit hours of liberal arts and sciences/general education coursework.

   Rationale: Associate in Arts degree programs are intended to provide a broad liberal arts and sciences background. Completion of 60 credits of liberal arts and sciences often satisfies the lower division general education requirements of baccalaureate degree programs.

b. Programs designated as Associate in Science (A.S.) should be composed of at least 45 quarter credit hours of liberal arts and sciences/general education coursework.

   Rationale: Associate in Science programs are intended to provide a liberal arts and sciences background as well as provide the foundation for baccalaureate programs with highly structured lower division requirements. Holders of an A.S. degree should be able to expect that a major portion of the lower division requirements will have been satisfied if they pursue a baccalaureate program closely related to their lower division coursework. General education coursework should transfer, but would probably be reviewed on a course by course basis.

c. Programs designated as Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) should be composed of at least 30 quarter credit hours of liberal arts and sciences/general education coursework.

Rationale: Associate in Applied Science programs are intended to prepare people for employment. Although transfer toward a baccalaureate degree is not a major objective of people who seek this degree, some students may choose to pursue a baccalaureate degree where the A.A.S. coursework would be at least partially applicable toward their chosen major. At a minimum, the general education component of the A.A.S. degree should be reviewed for acceptance on a course by course basis.

APPENDIX 3
AGREEMENT FOR TRANSFER OF GENERAL EDUCATION FROM THE MINNESOTA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM TO THE STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

We, the undersigned, attest that representatives of our systems have arrived at an Agreement, whereby the Associate in Arts Degree awarded by each of the eighteen community colleges will signify that the distributed general education requirement has been met, in partial fulfillment of requirements for a Baccalaureate Degree at each of the state universities.

The terms of this Agreement are as follows:

1. Each community college, affecting students receiving the A.A. degree at Spring Quarter graduation of 1986 and later, shall implement a new minimum requirement for distributed general education. This requirement includes a provision that "sixty credits of the total (for the A.A.) shall be in distributed liberal arts and sciences which are defined as intended for transfer. Included in the sixty shall be a minimum of eight in English Composition, and a minimum of twelve each in Humanities, Social Sciences, and Math and/or Natural Sciences."

2. The state universities agree to grant a waiver to transfer students who are unable to complete the new prescribed general education curriculum during the 1985-86 year in preparation for entering the state university in Fall, 1986, allowing instead a continuation for one year of the current agreement in effect at each university.

3. The Community College System shall provide the State University System with a list of approved liberal arts disciplines and courses which are to be included in the distributed liberal arts component of each institutions' associate in arts degree. This list is to be approved by the Community College Board for each individual community college and is to reflect the discipline areas agreed to by the State University System.

4. Representatives of the Community College System and the State University System shall meet annually to review the implementation of this articulation agreement.

Copies of this Agreement are to be recorded with minutes of a meeting of the Board for Community Colleges and of the State University Board, respectively.

Gerald W. Christenson, Chancellor
Community College System

Jon M. Wefald, Chancellor
State University System

September 25, 1985

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JUNIOR COLLEGES APR 10 1987